



THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS



MANGALURU • FRIDAY • DECEMBER 29, 2017 • ₹5.00 • PAGES 16 • CITY EDITION



QUIET ROLLBACK OF LPG PRICE HIKE ORDER

Monthly hikes of ₹4 per cylinder withdrawn as it was deemed contrary to the Ujjwala scheme to give the poor free cooking gas connections

DECISION TAKEN TWO MONTHS AGO

An order dated May 30, 2017 authorised an increase in prices of subsidised domestic LPG by ₹4 per cylinder per month till the reduction of govt subsidy to 'nil' or March 2018. It later dawned on the government that this would hurt the objective of the Ujjwala scheme, and it withdrew the order in October

BUT PRICES ROSE EVEN AFTER OCTOBER

Even after the order was withdrawn, prices of subsidised LPG continued to rise because of taxation issues, said a source
The price of subsidised LPG was last raised by ₹4.50 per cylinder on Nov 1 to ₹495.69, according to a notification by state-owned firms. The price was ₹419.18 in June 2016

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21% institutes don't offer industry exposure to students

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY

Four institutes out of 4,790 had in-depth linkage with industry

1,626 institutes interacted with 20 or more companies in past two years

893 institutes filed at least one patent in past two years

125 institutes earned ₹50 lakh or more from projects

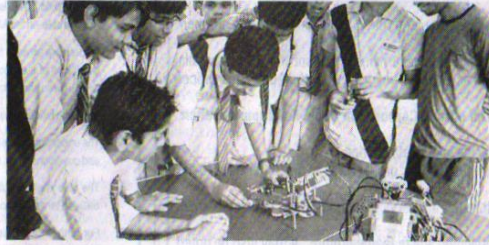
854 institutes incubated at least two start-ups in past two years

114 institutes received funds of ₹50 lakh or more from industries in past two years

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @New Delhi

DESPITE the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) rule of mandatory internships for students in technical institutions, over 21 per cent institutions teaching engineering, management, architecture and pharmacy do not offer any industry exposure to students, a survey has found.

The AICTE-Confederation of Indian Industries Survey of Industry Linked Technical Institute 2017 on mostly private technical institutes from tier II and tier III cities also highlighted that only four out of over 4,500 institutes surveyed had industry links that can be rated as "extremely good or in-depth". Only 1,626 institutes, of the total 4,790 surveyed between June and Au-



gust this year, had interacted with 20 or more companies in the last two years, while only 114 had received funds of ₹50 lakh or more for research innovations.

The findings do not include data from the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) and

other Centrally-funded technical institutes as they did not participate in the survey.

"The survey points out that employability of students taught in non-premier institutes remains a challenge owing to the low in-training industry exposure and the quality of education

received," said an executive related with the survey.

"A strong school-industry linkage is a necessity to bring about skilled and efficient manpower. It is not only about providing on the job training or lectures to vocational students by experts but also crucial from the industry point of view," he added.

Anil Sahasrabudde, AICTE chairman said the council is "facilitating internship programmes of over five lakh students in established firms, start-ups and government departments but several institutes need to chalk out their paths".

Last year, a survey by employability assessment firm Aspiring Minds said 95 per cent of 10 lakh engineers who pass out every year don't have industry relevant skills.



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WHAT AILS ENGINEERING?

As engineering education hits a plateau, the All India Council for Technical Education's decision to relax the teacher-student ratio is no surprise. The national body had to give in to persistent demands of private technical institutions which are reeling from massive drop in admissions year on year. According to the AICTE, the total enrolment in undergraduate seats in private engineering colleges during 2016-17 stood at about 6.89 lakh against the intake capacity of 14.42 lakh—roughly 48 per cent, down from 60 per cent five years ago.

With admissions dwindling, private colleges have argued that the prescribed 1:15 teacher-student ratio left faculty members with little work. Originally devised to provide scope for research work to teachers and their interface with students as well as industry, it was not followed or enforced in true spirit. Experts believe the relaxation of the ratio to 1:20 may not impact the quality of engineering education because a large number of colleges, as it is, make do with part-time faculty and even fresh graduates. Though the decision is aimed at providing some relief to private engineering institutions, the AICTE must look at the big picture and act tough to ensure that the latter provides outcome-based education to students. Over the years, the exact opposite has happened. The quality of engineering graduates has nosedived, while industry demand has plunged due to sluggish economic growth. But there are too many engineering graduates—with too little skill. Campus placement of BE/BTech graduates was barely 45 per cent last year.

This is what the UR Rao Committee had forewarned in 2004 in its review of technical education. Its recommendations are more relevant than ever. The AICTE has made a start by going in for progressive closure of institutes and courses faring badly but strong decisions like imposing a moratorium on new institutes should be considered. It's time to focus on the quality of education or India risks losing the demographic advantage.